

Good morning. My name is Pattie Johnston. I am the Senior Outreach Coordinator for the Lawrence Public Library. In this capacity, I am also a member of the Douglas County Advocacy Council on Aging, the Older Women's League, AARP and am a board member for the Douglas County Senior Services. In all of these organizations and in the daily contact I have with seniors in my job, I have found that older members of our communities have the same desire for keeping their minds active as their need to keep well physically. Some may have health limitations but their capacity for learning and for sharing their life-long experiences is still strong. Too often, society discounts a person because of their age and has the perceived notion that this person no longer cares about the world around them. It is up to us to change the image of aging by giving opportunities for older adults to continue to learn new skills, new information and to share the knowledge that has taken them a lifetime to acquire. There is no magic number when someone is "old". We must acknowledge that Seniors are interested in being a major part of all aspects of our communities. We must acknowledge that they have much to contribute. Times do change. Technology is making changes so rapidly that it is difficult for any of us to keep up but we must remember that the developments were started by those who are now Seniors. The solution is not to merely provide money for studies or surveys on what seniors need, want or desire. We must create opportunities where older people are involved in continuing their lifelong learning. Libraries have started making seniors a priority in the services provided. By realizing that there may be special needs instead of ignoring these patrons, libraries are reaching out to them. By designing areas, where patrons do not need to bend or reach over their heads for books, where lighting is better, where steps are not required and seating is adjacent to material as well as having programming focused to them, libraries are acknowledging Seniors as a major part of its patronage. This can be done by many organizations but it must first be acknowledged that Seniors are an important part of the community. Cooperative efforts by private and public organizations to incorporate Seniors into decision making and to provide points of opportunities for those interested to become involved can be done. This isn't difficult. The difficult part is changing our attitude on what constitutes growing older. Aging is not a disease. Why do we treat it as such?